

THE PEOPLES VOICE

A MONTHLY BULLETIN ISSUED BY

THE PEOPLES CHURCH

THIRD AVENUE AT SIXTH STREET

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA

“It is difficult to make a man miserable while he feels he is worthy of himself and claims kinship to the great God who made him.”— LINCOLN.

“The race gave me a hearing on the great and durable question of the age, which I could have had in no other way; and tho I now sink out of view, and shall be forgotten, I believe I have made some marks which will tell for the cause of civil liberty long after I am gone.”— LINCOLN.

W. WALDEMAR W. ARGOW

MINISTER

VOL. I

FEBRUARY, 1922

NO. 2-A

NOTICE

The publication of this bulletin is made possible by a People's Pulpit Fund. Voluntary gifts to this fund are therefore greatly needed and may be sent to the treasurer, Mr. William F. Hirst, 1732 Blake Boulevard, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

The People's Pulpit, by tradition and practice, is a free platform, dedicated to the ideal of truth. Its addresses in both their spoken and written form, are the utterances of the speaker, who accepts for them exclusive responsibility.

This number is dedicated to that "remaining precious remnant" of valiant warriors who fought with Lincoln — The T. Z. Cook Post, Number 235, Department of Iowa, Grand Army of the Republic, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

"WAS ABRAHAM LINCOLN A CHRISTIAN?"

Being an Address Delivered in
The People's Church, Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Sunday Morning, February 12, 1922

By W. WALDEMAR W. ARGOW, Minister

Great lives are like great trees; their size is not known until they are cut down. Great lives are like alluvial floods; the richness of their deposit is not apparent until they are past. Great lives are like beautiful roses; their sweet fragrance is not fully appreciated until they are blown. Great lives are like wonderful symphonies; their real value comes to us on the wings of memory. Such a life was Abraham Lincoln's! No wonder Stanton could say, as he tiptoed into Lincoln's death chamber at twenty-two minutes past seven on the morning of April 15, 1865, "Now he belongs to the ages!" He is so great that no country could alone contain him; no continent could alone enshrine him within its boundaries. He belongs to the world as the first world citizen. Not only was he the first world citizen, but withal a great high priest of all the people, white and black, free and slave, ministering at the altar of justice and liberty. So long as men shall record their histories Lincoln's name will be found among their sacred annals as a savior of the people.

Well do we pause amid the rush for livelihood and pleasure to reflect upon the life of this mighty one who died that others might live. For without Lincoln the moral history of America would be but "sounding brass and tinkling cymbals." "Being dead, yet he speaketh, and liveth forevermore." Year after year he continues to "tower o'er the wrecks of time," rising up to kiss the skies like a submerged mountain peak, having heard again the call of the Infinite Vastness." Lincoln is more than a mere man, more than a mere historical character, more than a mere patriot; he is part of

the moral and spiritual gravity drawing men and nations towards the center of liberty. He represents the beginning of a new era in the social evolution of man. Indeed, he is one of those rare supermen who today, and for all time to come, lives in the hearts of men.

But having been a man clothed in the garment of human mortality he has not escaped the poisoned arrows of destructive criticism. The greater the man, the more numerous and vicious are the attacks made by men with shriveled souls. Being a Matterhorn among mortals, it is impossible for me to add one cubit to his stature, nor can I add one additional bit of lustre to his already shining countenance. I cannot add to, or subtract from, his record. It is an open book, seen and read by all men. As such it needs no interpreter to explain it; no guardian angel to protect it, and no publicity agent to give it prominence. "The dear Lord's best interpreters are humble human souls." So Lincoln spent his entire life writing his own biography in the manner in which he lived.

It is vitally important to us that we study the inner life of Lincoln in order to discover if possible whether or not, he was a Christian. If he was not a Christian, then we must account for his noble life on some other basis. If Lincoln was not a Christian, then the world has stupidly overlooked a reservoir of power out of which Lincoln, and men of his kind, have drawn their strength. For great souls demand great sources of strength. I fear sometimes that in our haste to get quick results, we are apt to grow mushrooms instead of oak trees. Mushrooms grow overnight, but oak trees demand years, storms and tempests. Surely if men like Lincoln can become what they were without being Christians, then there is something radically wrong with us who are Christians for not producing something of greater power than he. Either we or our Christianity is at fault "that we are underlings." It, therefore, behooves us to discover that source of strength and sustain our lives upon it, that we too, may become masters of destiny.

Was Abraham a Christian? I am obliged to answer, "No!" when estimated by the conventional standards held by the church of his day. For Lincoln never united with any church organization. This, as we know, was the only official manner in which one could be recognized as a Christian. All persons not belonging to any church were considered heathen and infidels, and were to be damned eternally after death. Lincoln said he had never given his affirmation to any formulated creed which the church had drawn up. He held that the average man was more just in his dealings with his fellows than those creeds reputed God to be. For him organized Christianity was little other than organized hypocrisy and blatant injustice to

God. He was not, therefore, a Christian because he never made a signed confession of faith, declaring thereby that he believed this, that or something else. He had little or no use for theology, and still less for the shams by which many lived under the guise of being Christian.

But ever since Lincoln's death, the churches have made every possible effort to prove that he did unite with the church; that he did make and sign a confession of faith, but without success. They found it was necessary to do this in order to justify their theological contentions, and to save Lincoln from being consigned to an endless hell. With the latter, the world would not be content; hence they were obliged to resort to fabrication of one kind or another. Did not Henry VIII of England do the same! When he wanted to divorce his wife, he sent the most learned theologians to Rome to ascertain if some of the cannons of the Roman church might not be so interpreted to justify his immoral and inhuman procedure. This is in accord with a bit of verse, learned in our youth, "When the devil was sick a saint he would be; when the devil was well, the devil was he."

Added to the evidence that Lincoln was not a Christian, is the additional charge of being an infidel made by Peter Carthwright in his first congressional campaign in 1846. This said Peter Carthwright was his political opponent: he was also a Methodist minister, which however, does not make the charge any the more true. Our sinister purposes are no different today during the time of political campaigns. Recall what was said about Ex-President Wilson during his second campaign; he was called an adulterer, dope fiend and drunkard. Recall, also, what was said about President Harding, namely, that he had negro blood in his veins; that he was owner of a brewery and that he had mistresses in distant cities. I would to God that the mouths of men and women who so seek to besmirch men's lives might be smitten dumb, and their tongues cleave to the roof of their mouths. Verily, political partisanship will make devils of many and fools of still more.

This Peter Carthwright and his friends had heard that Lincoln delivered a manuscript to Mr. Hill in Salem, Ill., where Lincoln was teaching school. This manuscript contained invoices, together with a love letter which Hill had written to Miss Anne Ruthledge. Up until this time, Hill had jointly owned a general store with Tom McNeil, but because of the incompatible disposition of Hill, McNeil decided to sell out his half of the store to Hill. Thereupon McNeil made an invoice of the stock in the store and bundled these invoices together with other personal papers of Hill's and sent them to him. The messenger entrusted with these papers lost them on

the way. When Lincoln came along the road after school hours, he found these papers, and like every nineteen year old lad, was anxious to see what they contained. The dry statistics interested him little. But we can well imagine with what eager interest he read this love letter of a man twenty years older than his sweetheart. Up to the store he went with papers in hand, a grin on his face, and a mischievous chuckle under his breath, where he handed them to Mr. Hill. When Hill discovered that Lincoln had in his possession this love letter, he flew into a rage and threw the whole bundle into an open stove. Suffice to say that he called Lincoln all sorts of names. For who wouldn't when your love notes to your best girl are read by another. I fear many of us today would call such a man many names not learned in Sunday school! It is only when we see the humor of this situation that we discover how utterly absurd any charge of infidelity, or unbelief, might be as arising from it. In the store where this incident occurred, there was the usual "cracker barrell congress." These men did not know what the rumpus was all about, for Hill never told them. But later when pressed for an explanation, Hill said Lincoln had written an essay in which he denied the existence of God and in general set forth his unbelief in Christianity. Because of this, Hill became so angry that he had thrown the papers into the fire and called Lincoln all these pretty names. This same group of gossip mongers peddled this information about after a few years, using it against Lincoln in his first congressional campaign. This charge was again circulated during his presidential campaign. It was made particular capital of by the rebels in the southern confederacy. Never did Lincoln refute this charge, as many of his friends exhorted him to do. When asked about it during his campaigns, he would reply, "This campaign is not a religious quarrel; it is a fight of right against wrong."

On an earlier occasion, as early as 1833, Lincoln did write an essay against the theory of eternal punishment. This he gave to Mentor Graham. Speaking of the merit of this essay in latter years, Mr. Graham said it was one of the most logical arguments he had ever seen or heard. In it Lincoln affirmed his belief in God and in the moral splendor of Jesus' teachings; but he also contended that the theory of eternal punishment as taught by the churches in his day was a direct contradiction of the teachings of Jesus.

So much then, to show that Lincoln was not a Christian, as viewed by the standards of conventional Christianity in the day in which he lived. These standards, let me say, were narrow, cramped, sectarian and wholly unethical. I am also prone to say they were almost unchristian. Even Jesus himself could not have been rated

a Christian according to them. For even He found himself outside of the Jewish church because he could not conform to its narrow standards, its legalistic interpretations of life's values.

Now, then, I wish to show by Lincoln's own life that he was a Christian, even as few have been prior or since. It is by the "fruits" we discover his Christianity.

First of all, it is necessary to see the background of Lincoln's life if we would rightly understand how and why he came to hold these great convictions.

There is first his heredity through his mother, Nancy Hanks. Somehow there is an element of truth in what an old Catholic priest once said that we must begin to train a child a hundred years before its birth. This would imply that blood tells. Oh! the glorious business of being a Mother! What a responsibility rests upon young men and young women in their choice of a life companion with whom they intend to blend their spirit to bring forth an immortal soul. Lincoln's mother was such a one. She carved upon the delicate nerve paths of the little life she carried beneath her heart, tendencies which became tendencies of destinies. After his birth came poverty, privation and suffering. During this time he went to school to the Greatest Teacher in the world—his mother. At the age of nine this guardian angel was snatched away by a dread disease. From this time on he was schooled in poverty, hardiness and loneliness. Then came the day when his sweetheart was taken and he was bereft of her influence. After many disappointments and sacrifices, he finally espoused an unpopular cause which divided families against each other and rent a nation in twain. But never once during all this time did he complain, nor did he lose his faith that "somehow, right the day must win and that to falter would be sin." Out of all these experiences he fashioned for himself a philosophy of life. By this philosophy he lived and by it was sustained through all the severe trials of his life. Never did he set forth this philosophy in so many words. It was involved, however, in the very nature of his being.

(1)—He held that we live in a universe in which right and justice are at the very heart of things. For he said, "If we do right, God is with us, and if God is with us, we cannot fail." "Let us do the right as God gives us to see the right." He held that any cause that is just must ultimately be victorious. When asked if he thought God was on his side, replied, "I am not so much concerned whether God is on our side as I am whether we are on God's side." This sublime moral fatalism made him a man of steel able to withstand all compromise. He knew that every right endeavor carried in it the seeds of victory.

(2)—He believed, and so lived, that love was the strongest power and method in all the world. Love, not as a sentiment, but as a life-habit. One day, while sailing down the Patomac river, seeing some rebel soldiers, interned along the bank, Mrs. Lincoln said, "Look, there are some enemy soldiers." Instantly he turned upon her saying, "Woman, never let me hear you say that word enemy again. They are not enemies, but friends." Likewise in that same spirit, did he close his second inaugural address with similar words: "We are not enemies, but friends. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic words of memory will yet swell the chorus of the union when again touched, as surely they shall be by the better angels of our nature." This spirit made him as Walt Whitman sings, "The Beloved Captain."

(3)—He believed in and practiced forgiveness. Therefore, he could say, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in." His treatment of rebel soldiers, of deserters and traitors among the union, of his own cabinet members—Seward and Stanton—who all but betrayed him; of McClellan and Chief Justice Chase, and at last of General Lee at the fall of Richmond, are classic illustrations of this forgiving life.

(4)—He held to the sacredness of every human life as over against the sacredness of property. This was the primary cause for which the Civil War was waged. When as a young man he sailed down the Mississippi river to New Orleans and witnessed the sale of human being, said, "If I ever have a chance to strike slavery at its roots, I'll strike it hard!" And strike he did, until the sound of his striking was heard "round the world," and from that day until this, shackles have been falling from the slaves.

(5)—He believed that it was necessary for everyone to do the will of God in all the affairs of life. When in August, 1846, he was a guest in the Rankin home at Petersburg, Ill., Mrs. Rankin asked him about the charge of infidelity flung at him by his political opponents, he gave that classic statement of his religious beliefs which herewith follows:

"I have never united myself to any church, because I have found difficulty in giving my assent, without mental reservation, to the long, complicated statements of Christian doctrine, which characterize their articles of Belief and Confession of Faith. When any church will enscribe over its altar, as its sole qualification for membership the Savior's condensed statement of the substance of the gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy

soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,' that church will I join, with all my heart and all my soul."

Now, to answer the question, Was Lincoln a Christian? Yes! He was the finest type of Christian the world has ever known. He was so true, so large that no church could contain him. He lived above the petty, narrow, restrictions of his time. He belonged to those "noble souls (who) through dust and heat rise from disaster and defeat—the grander."

And, now, who was Lincoln? He was like a mighty river. A river begins in the silent, secret precincts of the hills, near to God. Patiently, the spring wends its way down the hillside adding to its flow waters from smaller springs. Now the sun kisses it and reflects in its dimpled surface the infinite sky. Gradually this mountain stream becomes a meadow brook bringing refreshment to drooping plants and cooling drink to thirsty men and beasts. Day after day, the sun broods over it and draws from it mists which it distills in sweetened dew during the stillness of the night. On and on it flows ever adding to its might and power, until at last the great vessels are carried on its bosom. Now it carries the weight of traffic; again it turns the wheels of progress; again it refreshes cities, counties, states and countries. Then comes the time when it flows into the vast ocean, mingling its waters and its health with other rivers which have come from the far ends of the earth. At last it says good-bye to hill and shore, and loses its identity in the infinite ocean. Such a river was Lincoln! Being once a tiny spring on a mountain side near the heart of God, he has at last blended his fruitful life into the mighty ocean of the world's Immortals.

He was—

"A blend of mirth and sadness, smiles and tears;
A quaint knight-errant of the pioneers;
A homely hero, born of star and sod,
A peasant-prince, a masterpiece of God."

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THE TORCH PRESS
CEDAR RAPIDS
IOWA

Kind reader, if what is contained herein expresses your idea of a Christian, we extend to you a hearty welcome to come and fellowship with us.

The aim of this society is to cultivate Freedom, Friendship, and Fraternity in religion, in behalf of all that makes for private nobility and public welfare. Believing that a unity of the spirit is better than a uniformity of theology, we welcome to our fellowship everyone who is seeking truth and righteousness, whatever his faith or opinion may be, leaving each one free to think and act for himself. No creed or ritual is imposed as a requisite of membership, but simply a desire to help forward the cause of spiritual culture and the higher life.

I desire to be recognized as a member of this society.

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